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"TRYING TO CATER FOR EVERYONE"

A New Zealander Learns About The BBC

SIDELIGHTS on the BBC and its policy, as they were revealed to a young New Zealand airman in England, are given in this article, written for "The Listener" by **SERGEANT REECE SMITH**, who went to Great Britain early this year.

COMING up on the inside of *The Times* as the most-quoted British opinion is the BBC, empty of avowed politics, and full of news which has seldom been questioned on point of fact. However, the criticism spared the news section of the BBC has been rapidly transferred to another front, the entertainment section. The critics had been firing ranging shots on this sector since the Corporation was first formed, but their barrage really went down at the beginning of the war, when private transmitters were closed down for security reasons, and the British public was left to the mercies of the BBC.

Some of the well-concentrated salvos have been heard in New Zealand. The loudest of these, which was given consideration in *The Listener* at the time,

proclaimed the setting up of a committee for the banishment of "slush" from England's well-bred air, "slush" being taken to include such request-session princes as Bing Crosby and Glen Miller. The trend of criticism implied that the BBC's head was buried in the sands of Coates, Ketelbey and other respectable composers whose fan-mail causes no postman any bother. Belief in these cables caused me to land in England drearily resigned to undergoing "musical improvement." Perhaps a sparkling Victor Sylvester session as a Saturday night treat.

"Sublimely Self-Assured Institution"

A BBC man with whom I recently travelled down in the train from Carlisle to Preston straightened out several of these points for me, uncovered some more. First, regarding much of the criticism in the newspapers, he said the papers were rather envious of the BBC, which, by virtue of its multiple bulletins, frequently beats them on news releases. This envy is expressed in periodical railing at the BBC's stodginess. This contrasts with New Zealand, where the stodgier medium, the papers, do their best to ignore the radio world completely, as by reporting ministerial broadcasts as "in an address last night."

By making no reply to the papers, the BBC emerges with dignity but gives no justification of its policy. In this respect it appears as a sublimely self-assured institution, but it does try to keep track of what the public wants. The qualifications for directorship are on the subtle side, judging by the lightness with which BBC directors pop off to take executive positions with British Overseas Airways (Lord Reith) and the Mine Owners' Association (Robert Foot), but there is a department at the BBC devoted to sounding current tastes, so their man told me. And his further point was the ease of catering for the majority, but the difficulty of catering for everyone. The BBC, he said, sets itself the difficult task.

Nor is it possible to cater for tastes in zoned time, as it is in New Zealand: general cheer till 9.0 a.m., the working housewife till mid-day, then more general cheer, the time-wealthy classicist in the early afternoon, followed by more housewife, and only the evening devoted to mixing it for everyone. Widespread shift work in Britain leads to someone of every taste being a listener at every stage of the day, and this does not simplify the programme department's task.

The first move in catering for everyone has been to divide the transmission into two, the General Forces Service and the Home Service. The Home Service occasionally evinces a tendency to talks on the first cuckoo of spring, how to bath the baby, Albania in 1924, and so on, and also for the heavy dinner music which passes itself off as "classical." Generally it may be compared to the restrained, informative tone of New

(continued on next page)



YAWNING—CURE FOR TOOTHACHE! Ancient Druids gave the following cure for toothache: "for toothwark (toothache) if the worm eat the tooth, take an old holly leaf in one of the lower umbles of hartwort, and the upper part of sage, boil two doles in water, pour into a bowl and yawn over it. The worm shall then fall into the bowl".

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ANCIENT GREEKS

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